

THE STORY OF KNEMON IN HELIODOROS' *AITHIOPIKA*

HELIODOROS' *Aithiopia* is the story of Theagenes and Charikleia: of their falling in love, their elopement from Delphi where Charikleia lives as the adopted daughter of the priest of Apollo, their encounters with pirates, bandits and unwanted suitors, and finally of their arrival in Ethiopia, land of Charikleia's birth, where she is recognised as the daughter of the king and queen, and the lovers' union is sanctioned, sanctified and implicitly consummated after the conclusion of the narrative. It is a commonplace of discussion of the novel to draw attention to the artfulness with which the story is presented,¹ to the temporal dislocations occasioned by beginning the plot (or narration) in the middle of the story,² and to the consequent shift which the author has been able to effect from the straightforward, linear, proairetic mode of simple storytelling to a hermeneutic mode³ which draws the reader into a quest, shared with the characters of the novel, for true understanding of facts of which he is already in possession.

Near the beginning of the novel, however, is inserted a novella on an apparently unconnected subject: the experiences of a young Athenian, Knemon, with whom Theagenes and Charikleia share captivity among the Boukoloi, Egyptian outlaws who infest the marshes of the Nile Delta. This subsidiary narration, which takes up a sizeable proportion of the first book, would be a surprising, not to say distracting, excursus in an ordinary proairetic text; but in one like Heliodoros', whose beginnings are so full of enigmas and uncertainties, it runs the risk of throwing the reader into deep confusion. It is difficult enough to identify and integrate the fragmentary lines of the main narrative, whose hero and heroine—if they are even recognised as such⁴—are at this stage little more than names to the reader, without the intrusion of a secondary (or *is it secondary?*) narrative whose relationship to the main plot will remain for some time problematic and undefined.

Thus Knemon's story invites questioning at two levels: from the first-time reader seeking to locate and connect the two narratives with which he is being compelled to juggle; and from a reader looking back from the end of the text, or reading the novel for a second time, trying to account for and legitimate the prominent position of the novella in the structure of the novel as a whole. Whatever one's final view of Heliodoros' literary stature, whether or not the *Aithiopia* is anything more than just a story told superlatively well, it is obvious that it is a skilfully engineered text in which things do not happen at random. We are entitled, then, invited, even obliged, to assume that there is reason, and hence meaning, in the author's decision to arrange and present his material in the way he does. The purpose of this paper is to set out some possible

¹ Cf. esp. V. Hefti, *Zur Erzählungstechnik in Heliodors Aithiopia* (Vienna 1950) 1 ff., 98 ff.; C. W. Keyes, *Studies in Philology* xix (1922) 42–51; B. P. Reardon, *Courants littéraires grecs des II^e et III^e siècles après J.-C.* (Paris 1971) 381 ff.

² This antithesis between 'plot' (or 'narration') and 'story' is as close as one can get in English to the distinction made by the Russian Formalists between *sjuzhet* (the sequence of events as presented in the narrative) and *fabula* (the sequence of events as they 'really' happened), and taken up by French structuralists in the terms *récit* and *histoire*.

³ These rather nasty terms 'proairetic' and 'hermeneutic' are taken from the 'codes' of reading analysed by R. Barthes in *S/Z* (Paris 1970; English trans. by R. Miller [London 1975]). The 'proairetic' code directs the way the reader follows and integrates the plot, step by step according to the logic of the action; the 'hermeneutic' the solution of enigmas. In redeploying the terms to denote types of narrative I am following the precedent

of P. Brooks, *Reading for the plot* (Oxford 1984) 18 ff.

⁴ Some MSS of the *Aithiopia* (BPZ) include the names of heroine and hero in the title given at the beginning of the first book; and the Byzantines in general seem to have referred to the novel simply as Χαρίκλεια (cf. the citations given as Testimonia nos. x, xii, xv, xvii, xix, xx in the edition of the novel by A. Colonna [Rome 1938]). A reader of such a copy would find little difficulty in locating the main characters. But other MSS (CVM) are headed simply 'Ἡλιοδώρου Αἰθιοπικῶν βιβλίον πρῶτον (*vel sim.*), and our earliest reference to the work (Sokr. *Hist. ekkl.* v 22 [= Colonna Test. i]) seems to confirm that this was the novel's original title. Anyone reading a MS of this kind would have to wait until the course of the narrative itself cast Theagenes and Charikleia as hero and heroine. It is tempting to read this as a deliberate manoeuvre to prolong the reader's uncertainty and sense of disorientation, an effect typical of the author, but one spoiled by the alternative title.

approaches to the problem posed by Knemon's novella, and then to propose a reading of it as a perhaps loosely connected but nonetheless germane component of the whole work.

I

Firstly, a summary of Knemon's story:

(a) i 9.1–14.2: Knemon's father, Aristippos, marries a second wife, Demainete, with whom he is infatuated. She, however, conceives a passion for her stepson, and one night when he returns from participating in the procession of the Great Panathenaia she attempts to seduce him while Aristippos is out of the house. She is rebuffed, and next morning accuses Knemon of having assaulted her, resulting in his receiving a beating from his father. Not satisfied with that, Demainete then sets a slave-girl, Thisbe, on to Knemon. Thisbe becomes intimate with him, and offers to show him his stepmother in bed with a lover. Sword in hand he goes to her room, only to discover that the man with her is his own father, who indicts him before the δῆμος on a charge of attempted parricide. Escaping execution only on a technicality, Knemon is exiled and goes to his mother's relatives on Aigina.

(b) i 14.3–17.6: the sequel is presented in a doubly inset narrative by Knemon's friend Charias, who is also intimate with Thisbe and thus able to use information obtained from her. Demainete continues to hanker for Knemon, and Thisbe, afraid that her resentment at his loss might lead to reprisals against herself, decides to strike first. She deceives her mistress into believing that Knemon is still in Athens, at the house of Arsinoe the flute-girl, whose lover he is. Thisbe offers to arrange for Demainete to take Arsinoe's place in Knemon's bed, and simultaneously informs Aristippos that he has an opportunity to take his wife in adultery. With further lies to Arsinoe about her purpose in borrowing the house, Thisbe duly instals Demainete in bed, and then leads in Aristippos. The non-existent lover supposedly escapes but Demainete is arrested. On her way to the assembly, however, she hurls herself into the βόθρος in the Akademia and dies. Aristippos begins to canvass for Knemon's return.

(c) i 18.1–ii 8.3: at this point Knemon breaks off his narrative, and we revert to the story of Theagenes and Charikleia, in which Knemon is now an actor. In the course of this section the village of the Boukoloï is attacked by a rival gang of bandits, and Charikleia, with whom the robber-chieftain Thyamis has fallen in love, is concealed for safety in a secret, labyrinthine cave. However, despairing of his own safety, Thyamis steals back to the cave, and there kills a Greek-speaking woman whom he believes to be his beloved Charikleia. When Theagenes and Knemon return to release her, they discover the body, which turns out, after a scene of tragic irony, not to be Charikleia at all, but Thisbe, much to Knemon's shock.

(d) ii 8.4–10.1: when Theagenes and Charikleia are reunited, Knemon resumes his narrative, this time using information from another friend, Antikles. After Demainete's death, Thisbe contracts a liaison with Nausikles, a merchant from Naukratis, previously the lover of Arsinoe. In jealousy, Arsinoe informs Demainete's family of Thisbe's machinations. Aristippos is brought to court and convicted not of murder but of being an accessory to Demainete's death: his property is confiscated and he is exiled. To escape interrogation under torture, Thisbe elopes with her merchant to Naukratis, whither Knemon pursues her in an effort to clear his father's name.

(e) ii 10.1–4: the mosaic is completed firstly by information from a tablet found on Thisbe's body, revealing that she had been held captive by Thyamis' ὑπάσπιστής, and secondly by . . .

(f) ii 12.2–3: an authorial statement to the effect that this ὑπάσπιστής had stolen her from Nausikles on the highway, and hidden her in the cave during the fighting, where Thyamis mistook her for Charikleia.

I have summarised the novella at length for two reasons. Firstly because the first stage in our discussion must be to examine its mechanical connection with the primary narrative;⁵ and secondly because some of its details will turn out to have a significance beyond their immediate function.

Most obviously, then, the novella accounts for the presence in Egypt of Knemon, who, although he does not play a strictly indispensable rôle in the plot itself and eventually drops out of the story in Book Six, is nevertheless a prominent figure who plays the important bit-part of 'hero's friend', saving Theagenes from suicide just as Polycharmos saves Chaireas in Chariton's novel,⁶ and most importantly acts as audience for Kalasiris' long narration of the early history of the love of Theagenes and Charikleia.

Scarcely less important is the figure of Thisbe, who has a significance extending beyond her function as a cog in the mechanism of the plot. At first she gives the impression of having been invented simply to provide a colourful and concrete motivation for Knemon's exile. Her reappearance in the narrative as a corpse is a stunning *coup de lecture*, almost as startling to the reader as it is to the unfortunate Knemon. There was of course no absolute necessity why the female killed in Charikleia's stead had to be anyone previously known to the reader, but it is undeniably more effective and economical that the solution to one enigma (the reader has been deluded into believing Charikleia dead, but it is unthinkable for a novel to lose its heroine with nine-tenths of the plot still to come; how can the apparent facts of the narrative be squared with the expectations inherent in the form?) should generate a new enigma (how did Thisbe come to be in the cave?) whose solution in its turn *is* functional to the plot: she was put there by the ὑπάσπιστής, who on his return to claim her will harbour natural enough suspicions that those on the scene of the crime are those responsible for her death. He is liable to turn dangerous and Knemon is given the task of losing him. Thus Knemon is separated from Theagenes and Charikleia and set up to become Kalasiris' audience.

Similarly Thisbe, this time in combination with her Naukratite lover Nausikles, is an essential part of the process by which Charikleia is separated from Theagenes but reunited with Kalasiris. In order to recover Thisbe Nausikles procures a detachment of Persian troops under their phourarch Mitranes to storm the Boukoloi's stronghold in the marshes. They arrive only after the destruction of the village by a rival gang of outlaws, and succeed only in capturing Theagenes and Charikleia. Nausikles, struck by Charikleia's beauty, identifies her as Thisbe—a deception in which she connives—while Theagenes is retained by Mitranes for the service of the Great King. The narration of this episode is characterised by its carefully controlled release of information: Kalasiris tells Knemon at ii 24.1 where Nausikles has gone, while Charikleia's experiences are filled in by a retrospective authorial narration running from v 4.3 to v 9.2, but only after Heliodoros has played with both Knemon's and the reader's puzzlement as to whether Nausikles might somehow be speaking the literal truth when he claims to have recovered 'a better Thisbe' (v 1.7 βελτίονα Θίσβην ἔκτησάμην).

Nausikles makes only an incidental appearance in the novella. At first he seems introduced merely as a convenience to get Thisbe to Egypt (ii 8.5), but he is named at his first appearance—a sign of importance—and his name can therefore startle both Knemon and reader when we learn that this same man is Kalasiris' host at Chemmis (ii 23.6). Although it is pure coincidence that Thisbe's lover is also owner of the house where Kalasiris tells Knemon the story of Theagenes and Charikleia, the coincidence is functional to the plot in the sense that, as we have seen, it allows for the interchange of Thisbe and Charikleia and the reunion, unexpected to Nausikles, of Charikleia and Kalasiris.

To draw these threads together, we can say then that part of the cast-list of the novella (Knemon, Thisbe, Nausikles) is firmly written into the central plot, and their relationships,

⁵ Well treated by G. N. Sandy, *Heliodorus* (Boston 1982) 33 ff.

⁶ ii 2.1, ii 3.4; cf. Char. i 5.2, i 6.1, v 10.10, vi 2.8 ff.

established in the novella, on some occasions function as necessary causal links in the primary plot, and on others permit the author to contrive effective but essentially decorative scenes such as Knemon's comic panic at Thisbe's apparent resurrection (v 2.1 ff.). It is also clear, I think, that there is considerable aesthetic advantage in presenting the material in the way that Heliodoros does. Given that the past of the characters is active in the present of the narrative, the alternative would have been to insert explanatory authorial statements as and when needed. But that would have been to run the risk of deflating and dissipating dramatic moments, and, more important, it would have produced a less sophisticated mimesis. That is to say that an overt intrusion of the authorial voice would draw attention to the fact that there *is* an author, whereas the indirect method which predominates in the *Aithiopika* allows the author to recede and authority for statements to be located inside rather than outside the frame of the plot, so producing a novel which, for all its artfulness, gives the impression of having written itself, of being a transcription of reality.⁷

Nevertheless, it is equally the case that there is much in the novella which is *not* organically connected to the central plot.⁸ In fact, the central parts of Knemon's story, his stepmother's attempts to seduce and destroy him, are, from the point of view of the novel-plot, no more than an elaborate apparatus to introduce the character of Thisbe. Aristippos and Demainete could be stripped away without leaving so much as a scar on the story of Theagenes and Charikleia. And yet it is precisely these elements which are thrown most into question and prominence through their problematic juxtaposition to the (as yet unintegrated) stump of the main plot; Thisbe's appearance is accounted for by her relation to Demainete in a way that Demainete's own entry is not by her sudden appearance at the head of an apparently unconnected sub-narrative. So, although during a first reading, when the reader's passions are directed forwards to the solution of the riddling opening scene of the whole novel and, beyond that, to discovering how the story ends, Demainete may be forgotten as the latter part of the novella meshes with and fuels the main plot, in retrospect or on a second reading the question of what exactly Demainete is doing in the text is liable to recur with redoubled force.

The mechanical approach to Knemon's narrative, then, offers an important but only partial answer to its problems. At this juncture we are faced with a choice: one might say that the elaboration of Knemon's novella at a length excessive for its strictly defined functional relevance is no more than an aesthetic miscalculation or self-indulgence on the author's part. There is nothing inherently implausible or unrespectable in such a view, and we must keep our minds open to it as a possibility. But before embracing a reductionist conclusion of this kind, we must explore other approaches in search of a convincing explanation.

II

We read a novel from a desire to know its ending, for it is only at the end of a novel that its meaning is complete.⁹ Yet the pleasure that we derive from following a plot resides in the tensions, uncertainties and thrills that we are made to experience. The knowledge which the ending brings and towards which our reading is directed is thus the end of our pleasure in the senses of both goal and extinction. In the course of a long and complex novel the final discharge of tension may well be anticipated several times *in parvo* as individual facts are made sense of, or partial explanations and understandings become apparent. And an author can prolong the

⁷ And so, of course, of being a transparent documentary record of 'real' events, rather than a self-referential text that constantly alludes to its own fictional status. The method of presentation is part of the realism of the *Aithiopika* which I analysed in my article 'History, romance and realism in the *Aithiopika* of Heliodoros',

ClAnt i (1982) 221-65; see esp. 260 ff.

⁸ Although a certain 'realistic residue' of non-essential material is only to be expected in the cause of the mimesis just referred to; cf. Morgan (n. 7) 250 ff.

⁹ Cf. Brooks (n. 3) 37 ff.

pleasure of his text by deferring the consummation of his plot. The next approach to Knemon's novella is to think of it as a retardation of the solution of the enigmatic opening tableau, and hence as a prolongation of the pleasurable uncertainty to which that solution must put an end.

A novelist usually achieves pleasurable prolongation by introducing complexity into his plot. To put it in its crudest terms, a 'happy ending' is a generic requirement of most types of fiction; even the occasional tragic ending¹⁰ gains much of its effect by the shock it administers to the reader's conditioned expectations. Complications in a romantic plot are generally of such a kind as to seem to block the path of the story towards the ending that the generically experienced reader would both expect and desire. A frisson of fear is generated that the plot will somehow short-circuit, reach the end too quickly and in the wrong way (for instance by the premature death of the central figures), a fear played off, of course, against a security implied by generic rules that guarantee, but not with absolute certainty, a happy ending. This kind of complication is characteristic of the surviving Greek romances: in structural terms the threats posed by all those pirates, shipwrecks, lustful rivals, obstructive parents and so on are blocks potentially capable of precipitating the wrong ending rather than essential links in the narrative chain. Threatened short-circuits of this kind abound in the *Aithiopia*, even to its very last pages, when the unexpected arrival of Charikles and his accusations against Theagenes (x 34 ff.) seem set to derail the plot just as it reaches its terminus.

However, this is not quite the effect of Knemon's novella. If we are to explain it in terms of functioning to produce suspense by deferring the progress of the main plot, it will have to be in a somewhat cruder manner. The main plot is simply postponed by the insertion of extraneous material—although, as we have seen, a proportion of this material turns out, unexpectedly, to be not quite as extraneous as it appeared at first sight. However, even a device as crude as this is capable of Heliodorian subtleties, and the very lack of connection has a positive point in that not only will the reader's desire to know what happens next in the main story grow more urgent in proportion to the length of the excursus, but so too will his desire to find the connection—if indeed there is one—between that excursus and the primary narrative. It is no accident therefore that the first part of the novella, the attempted seduction of Knemon by his stepmother, is the part least connected to the main plot, and that we are kept waiting, in suspense, until Thisbe reappears as a corpse before the mechanical meshing of the cogs can become apparent.

However, the kinds of effect which I have sketched in the two preceding paragraphs are really appropriate only to a straightforwardly proairetic narrative. But the impulse of the first half of the *Aithiopia* is primarily hermeneutic. That is to say that the reader, passionate for meaning, is less concerned with how the story of Theagenes and Charikleia will end than with how it began, or even who they are. His desires are attuned not to event but to explication, and this enables Heliodoros to work some rather clever tricks and conjure with a new and subtler form of suspense.

The novel opens with a macabre and memorable tableau: a beach strewn with twitching corpses, an empty ship, the only living figures a young woman of incomparable beauty tending a young man who lies at her feet. Our bewilderment as to what it is all about is intensified by the manner of the presentation: the scene is viewed through the eyes of Egyptian bandits peering down at it from the hilltops overlooking the Nile Delta and trying to interpret what they see. By themselves they are unable to 'read' the scene,¹¹ and the presumably omniscient author/narrator is keeping the truth to himself. Information can only reach us through the limited perceptions of the bandits, whose ignorance and puzzlement we have to share. It seems that the enigma will only be resolved by new information from within the narrative frame itself, and this appears to be on its way when the girl breaks into speech at i 3.1—but then our hopes of further enlightenment are brusquely shattered by the announcement at i 3.2 that the Egyptians cannot

¹⁰ There is no surviving example of an ancient novel that does not end happily, but compare the remarks of B. E. Perry on the lost *Kypriaka* of Xenophon of Cyprus

(*The ancient romances* [Berkeley 1967] 120 f.).

¹¹ i 1.7: οὐδὲ συσιέναι τὴν σκηπὴν ἐδύναντο; i 2.6: ἢ τῶν γινομένων ἄγνοια . . . τὰ ὄντα δὲ οὐπω ἐγίνωσκον.

comprehend a word she says (οὐδὲν συνιέναι τῶν λεγομένων ἔχοντες). Although we, the readers, can understand her words, or at least construe them grammatically, further revelations are thwarted by the absence inside the narrative of an audience with a similar level of comprehension. Heliodoros has arranged this sequence to titillate. He arouses desire to know, seems about to satisfy the desire, and then backs off at the last moment. He now proceeds to repeat the flirtation: the first bandits are driven off by a second group, who are also unable to make sense of the tableau, though they do make an attempt to surmise its meaning, producing an answer that even we, with our minimal information, know to be erroneous.¹² Their leader grabs the girl and tells her to come with him. This time the anticipated sequence of revelation is cut short even sooner, for *she* cannot understand what *he* is saying (i 4.1 τῶν . . . λεγομένων οὐδὲν συνιῆσα), and thus any further utterance (which might be informative to the reader if not to the bandits) is forestalled. The motivic repetition, underlined by verbal echo, makes it perfectly clear that any revelation *from* the couple on the beach (and the narrator has already shown himself disinclined to make any revelation *about* them) is going to be dependent on the presence of an audience capable of understanding the Greek language. This audience is, apparently, duly arranged when the young couple are entrusted to the care of another Greek prisoner, specifically for the sake of conversation (i 7.3 τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι ἕνεκεν). Knemon is thus set up to be the recipient inside the narrative of the revelation that the reader, outside the narrative, wants to eavesdrop on; after two false starts, one feels, the third approach must surely succeed. But what delicious frustration as Knemon blithely misunderstands the obvious implications of τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι ἕνεκεν and becomes narrator instead of audience! And, of course, the irony is compounded when Knemon does eventually become the audience he ought to have been earlier, but the audience of a new and unexpected narrator whose existence we had not even been led to suppose.

This is all an extremely witty and effective exploitation of the conventions of storytelling, and serves to illustrate the ludic elements implicit in the whole business of producing and consuming fictional narrative. The central convention of the realistic novel is precisely the pretence that there are *no* conventions, that the text is a transparent and mimetic transcription of its own imagined 'reality'. But Heliodoros exploits generically determined expectations that derive from officially non-existent conventions, and so comes within an ace of breaking the mimetic illusion, like when a character in a film suddenly acknowledges the existence of a camera whose presence the conventions of the medium had hitherto suppressed.¹³

This group of readings, then, stresses the function of Knemon's novella as interruption, and seeks to explain its presence in terms of the effects (suspense, frustration, titillation) which it allows the author to produce in the reader. As with the mechanical approach, we have an answer here but not a whole one. We can go some way towards explaining why there should be *some* digression from the main plot, but not why it has to be *this* one.

III

The third approach to the novella is perhaps liable to the same general criticism. This is to stress the manner rather than the matter of Knemon's narrative, as done by John J. Winkler recently in a fine and provocative paper.¹⁴ 'Knemon's tale is of special interest as a demonstration model of an alternative narrative strategy . . . the powerful narrative intellect

¹² i 3.5: οἱ δὲ λησταὶ [the new group] . . . ὑπὸ τῆς τῶν ὀρωμένων ἀγνοίας ἀμα καὶ ἐκπλήξεως τέως ἀνεστέλλοντο; i 3.6: τοὺς μὲν γὰρ πολλοὺς φόνους ὑπὸ τῶν προτέρων γεγενῆσθαι ληστῶν εἰκάζον.

¹³ I would not wish to argue that it was Heliodoros' *intention* to highlight the conventional aspects of fiction and hence the fictionality of his own discourse. It is

more that, as a virtuoso, he plays the game at the limit of its rules, thus running the risk of *incidentally* making conscious conventional rules of which every reader was already subconsciously aware anyway.

¹⁴ 'The mendacity of Kalasiris and the narrative strategy of Heliodoros' *Aithiopika* YCS xxvii (1982) 93-158.

which we can sense behind the opening tableau here enters a simpler persona and works within the narrower conventions of a naive raconteur in order to make clear what kind of story the *Aithiopika* is *not*.¹⁵ Winkler stresses the unproblematic nature of the novella's beginning, counterpointing the unintelligibility of the mysterious tableau at the start of the novel; and Knemon's straightforward chronological progression as opposed to the temporal inversions and convolutions of the primary narrative. We might summarise his conclusions—not I hope unfairly—by labelling Knemon's novella a proairetic narrative, whose function in the economy of the novel as a whole is to establish a paradigm of normal narration for the hermeneutic narrative of the novel itself to bounce off.

As a rhetorical device to allow Winkler to define with greater precision the nature of the novel's narration this antithesis is unobjectionable. But as a literal statement of the author's intentions it is much less attractive. Firstly, as Winkler himself admits, Knemon's novella is by no means a simple narrative. Despite the simplicity of its opening,¹⁶ it possesses a luxuriance of style little different from that of the author's own narration,¹⁷ the third sentence of Knemon's speech running to no fewer than seventy-five words; verbally Knemon is not characterised as a different kind of narrator from Heliodoros himself. Furthermore, his story is presented via a mechanism of multiple narrators, each with a limited point of view (Knemon, Charias, who in part reports Thisbe, Antikles), which demonstrates Heliodoros' concern for documentary realism (how does Knemon know what he tells?), but seems to weaken the contention that Knemon's novella serves as a paradigm of 'normal', straightforward if artistic and intelligent storytelling. Most importantly, it is not wholly accurate to suggest that Knemon's story is chronologically ordered. At the point where novella joins novel we know Thisbe's ending before we can understand what preceded it, and the final instalment of his narrative (§ *d* in the summary above) is expressly intended as retrospective explication of events (Thisbe's presence and death in Egypt, § *c* in the summary) whose meaning is, to the reader, enigmatic. As narrative strategy this approximates, admittedly in a less elaborated and prolonged form, to the answering of the riddle posed by the opening tableau in Kalasiris' retrospective narration: another indication perhaps that Knemon as narrator is not to be differentiated from his author.

Secondly, it is a rather lopsided view of the *Aithiopika* as a whole to characterise it solely as a hermeneutic text. After the narration of Kalasiris is concluded and the riddles of identity and causation have been solved, the *Aithiopika* proceeds to its ending as a wholly proairetic novel, though of a wonderfully sophisticated kind; and the fixed moral certainties of character which Winkler detects in Knemon's novella¹⁸ pertain equally, for instance, in the episode set in the satrap's palace at Memphis in Books Seven and Eight. It is unsatisfactory then to cast Knemon as 'naive raconteur' and set him in authorially intended opposition to the narration of the rest of the novel, when the narrative structure of the second and climactic half of the whole novel is, if anything, even more 'naive', in that omniscient third-person narrative is a simpler mode than documentary first-person. To pre-empt a somewhat larger argument, I would suggest that the simplification of narrative technique towards the climax of the novel betokens an overall emphasis on substance rather than manner, on story rather than narrative. Heliodoros, as a sophisticated storyteller, in other words, makes use of the hermeneutic mode for calculated effect, but in the last resort it is what the story is about rather than how it is told that really matters. It is perhaps typical of Winkler's concern with questions of narrative technique that he finds the structural complexities of the first half of the novel more compelling than the technically straightforward second half,¹⁹ just as he poses the enigma of the opening scene in

¹⁵ Winkler (n. 14) 107. I hope I am not distorting his sense by taking 'story' here to mean *sjuzet* rather than *fabula*; cf. n. 2.

¹⁶ ἰ 9.1: Ἦν μοι πατήρ Ἀρίστιππος, τὸ γένος Ἀθηναῖος κτλ.

¹⁷ Heliodoros generally makes no attempt to characterise through style. Even the eunuch Bagoas, whose

Greek is, we are specifically informed (viii 15.3), fractured, is presented speaking in fluent periods, with even a Euripidean allusion.

¹⁸ Winkler (n. 14) 107.

¹⁹ A perfectly valid judgment, of course, but patently not the author's own.

terms of narratorial authority rather than content (not ‘what has happened?’ but ‘who is telling?’).²⁰ Perhaps it is not too simple-minded to wonder whether these terms of reference are not anachronistic. Of course any text can be read as an ongoing commentary on its own strategies, but the conventions of the Greek romance, including the *Aithiopika*, seem to me to be representational rather than self-referential, and I find it hard to believe that the *Aithiopika* was written to be in essence a discourse about how to tell and read a story.

Thirdly, and very briefly, Winkler’s characterisation of Knemon as a naive raconteur is of a piece with his interpretation of him as a naive and sensation-seeking listener, ‘distanced from us by the broadly drawn comedy of his hyper-romantic sensibility’,²¹ and liable to miss or misunderstand the ironies and subtleties of Kalasiris’ account.²² But far from being distanced, Knemon is just one member of a whole series of audiences inside the fiction, starting with the bandits on the beach, who seem to serve as proxy for the real audience outside the fiction. A full understanding of Knemon’s rôle as listener would entail an investigation of all these other audiences too, and falls outside the scope of this paper. But we must at least enter a query against the suggestion that Knemon is a naive audience, and hence, by extension, against the cognate suggestion that he is a naive narrator whose product is in some sense held at a distance from both author and reader.

IV

Winkler himself offers a reading that puts the story of Knemon in counterpoint to that of the main plot, firstly in that it moves from simplicity to complexity as the main plot proceeds in the opposite direction, secondly in that like Charikleia’s story it deals in the themes of return from exile and vindication of a parent’s honour.²³ The reading that I wish to offer in conclusion might also be phrased in terms of counterpoint, but in a motivic and thematic rather than a structural sense.

Let us begin, as Heliodoros would have liked, with something quite different. In Book Six, after Kalasiris has been reunited with Charikleia through the offices of Nausikles, he and Knemon set off with their host in search of Theagenes, whom they believe to be in the custody of Mitranes the phrourarch. On their way, however, they encounter an acquaintance of Nausikles, from whom they learn that Theagenes has been snatched from Mitranes by the Boukoloi of Bessa under the command of Thyamis (vi 3.1–4). This is, as Sandy puts it,²⁴ ‘Heliodorus’ elaborate method of having Calasiris informed that Theagenes has passed from the hands of Oroondates’ [the satrap’s] agent to those of Thyamis’. We may add that it also serves to inform us that Thyamis, who disappeared from the narrative at the end of Book One, when he was captured alive by a rival gang of brigands,²⁵ has somehow—the details are never revealed—just become the leader of his captors.²⁶ The little scene then is an excellent example of the way that Heliodoros contrives to release information to his reader through the interaction of his *dramatis personae* and without intruding his own voice as omniscient narrator into the action.

What concerns us more in the present context, however, is the way that the anonymous informant is characterised. There was, of course, no need to characterise him at all. His is just a walk-on part, his only function to deliver his information before disappearing from the plot for good. But Heliodoros has elaborated him into an amusing vignette. When Kalasiris and his companions encounter him, he is in urgent haste on an errand for his mistress, Isias of Chemmis, who has commanded him to fetch her a flamingo. His whole life is devoted to her service; he

²⁰ Winkler (n. 14) 96 f.

²¹ Winkler (n. 14) 142.

²² Winkler (n. 14) 147.

²³ Winkler (n. 14) 108 f.

²⁴ Sandy (n. 5) 31.

²⁵ A state of affairs recalled as recently as v 4.3: ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ὁ μὲν Θύαμις ἀλοῦς ἐζώγητο καὶ εἶχετο αἰχμάλωτος . . .

²⁶ vi 3.4: ὁ τούτων ἐναγχος ἀποδειχθεὶς ἕξαρχος Θύαμις.

works his land for her and supplies her every need; she allows him no rest by night or day; and in return he receives nothing but mockery, unfounded accusations and ἀκκισμοί—playing hard to get.

It is quite clear that this apparently spontaneous little portrait is rather more than just a fleck of colour in the tapestry of entertainment. When the main narrative concerns a quest for Theagenes, whom Charikleia calls her soul and without whom she cannot live, it can be no accident that the vignette concerns a quest that is both trivial and futile, the whim of a cruel and capricious mistress. Equally it is no accident that the informant is presented as a man in love, but a love of a very different kind from that shared by Theagenes and Charikleia. He is a slave to his mistress, her ὑπηρέτης; his side of the relationship is figured by the word ὑπηρετοίμην (vi 3.2), while hers is underlined by a series of repetitions: τὰ προσταπτόμενα . . . ἐπιτάττη . . . ἐπίταγμα (vi 3.2) . . . τὰ ἐπιτάγματα . . . ἐπέταξεν (vi 3.3). We are dealing here with the erotic trope familiar to us from Latin love elegy as the *servitium amoris*, where it crystallises in the ambiguity of the word *domina*. The selfish and degrading materialism, the irresponsibility and absence of any basis for permanence in Isias' love are opposed to and illuminate the earnestness, the reciprocity, the spirituality, the life-long commitment and life-enhancing quality of the true love of Theagenes and Charikleia. Thus a minor figure whose function is merely that of a small component in a large and intricate mechanism is made the representative of an alternative and perverted style of loving: he forms one element of a moral polarity and so becomes part of an implicit statement of values.

What I want to suggest is that Knemon's novella works in much the same way, only on a much more comprehensive scale. It provides a prolonged portrait of perverted, immoral, simply bad love, which, by being placed programmatically at the start of the whole novel, will inform and structure by antithesis the reader's appreciation of the true love of the central characters, and at the same time provide positive points of reference for some of the hostile elements that threaten their love, notably the Persian princess Arsake. The novella is a paradigm, of an inverse kind, that provides a scale against which the significance of the central plot can emerge. Good and bad are two sides of the one coin: they cannot exist apart. Between them, the negative love of the novella and the positive love of the novel form a framework of moral values, the expression and reinforcement of which is the fundamental *raison d'être* of the *Aithiopia*. This may be best articulated in a series of polarities between the novel and the novella.

(a) The love of Theagenes and Charikleia is mutual. Thus, in describing how they fell in love at first sight, Kalasiris stresses that they were both equally affected (iii 5.4–6), and later he reassures Charikleia that Theagenes' feelings are as deep as her own and of the same kind (iv 11.2: ἀπὸ τῶν ὁμοίων); at iv 18.2 the lovers throw themselves at Kalasiris' feet and proclaim that they have forfeited everything ἴν' ἐκ πάντων μόνους ἀλλήλους κερδήσωσι; at v 5.2 their mutual love is a guarantee of recognition; and Charikleia's most secret prayer is that she and Theagenes will be preserved for one another (v 15.3). There is hardly any need to list declarations of love on both sides. The reciprocity of their passion is, of course, tightly laced into the whole structure of their story: it is a bond that draws them together when events conspire to pull them apart. Love in Knemon's Athens, on the other hand, is unreciprocated. Aristippos is infatuated with Demainete, virtually her slave (once again the *servitium amoris* figures the archetypal one-sided passion); Demainete for her part is obsessed with Knemon, who, for the most laudable of motives, shuns her advances; his sexual attentions are directed at Thisbe, but she is only acting under orders from her mistress, and feels nothing for him.

(b) Athenian love is egocentric. Demainete is interested only in her own gratification and is indifferent to Knemon's welfare; she sets in motion a scheme which she hopes will lead to his death, and at i 15.3 regrets the clemency of the court, which by sparing his life has also kept her passion alive. Thisbe's actions throughout are motivated by self-interest. This applies even to Knemon himself, who sees in Thisbe's behaviour only an index of his own increased attractiveness (i 11.3), and has no further regard for her feelings. The love of Theagenes and

Charikleia, on the other hand, involves the merging of self with another. So for Charikleia separation from Theagenes is tantamount to the loss of her own life (i 29.3: ὡσπερ ψυχῆς τοῦ Θεαγένους ἀφρημένην); their embraces seem to fuse their very beings (ii 6.3: ὡσπερ ἠνωμένοι; v 4.5: οἶονεὶ συμπεφυκότες); when Theagenes runs his race at Delphi, Charikleia's soul runs beside him (iv 3.3; cf. her reaction to his bull-chase at x 29.2); when she has lost Theagenes, Charikleia's only reason for continuing to live is the hope of reunion (v 2.9, cf. v 33.1). Both Theagenes and Charikleia persistently refer to the other as their ψυχή,²⁷ an erotic commonplace founded on the metaphorical premiss that lover and beloved between them constitute a single identity.²⁸ In fact the interests of the beloved often outweigh the lover's own: Charikleia on the beach at the start of the novel is more concerned for Theagenes' wounds than for her own dangers (i 3.6); Kalasiris recalls Charikleia for her manic excess of grief by reminding her that Theagenes depends on her life (vi 9.3); and even Arsake knows that a lover feels his beloved's pain more deeply than his own (viii 9.21). Repeatedly they express a preference for dying together rather than living apart.²⁹

(c) Athenian love is promiscuous and ephemeral, an appetite to be satisfied and abandoned. Knemon feels no compunction about embarking on a casual sexual liaison with a slave-girl, and even says in a perfectly matter-of-fact sort of way that he had himself tried to initiate such a liaison on many occasions in the past (i 11.3: ἡ πολλάκις πειρῶντά με ἀπωσαμένη . . .); his father finds Demainete's allegation that Knemon spends all his time drinking and whoring only too plausible (i 10.4). What Demainete feels for Knemon is nothing but a physical itch, with no sense of commitment or responsibility to him; and Thisbe convinces her that even this will disappear with its gratification.³⁰ Even while trying to seduce Knemon, Demainete continues to sleep with Aristippos, who has himself forsaken the memory of Knemon's mother to take a new wife. Thisbe in the course of the novella is represented as having sexual relationships with Nausikles and Charias as well as Knemon, and tricks Arsinoe into lending her the use of her house with a fiction of a fourth liaison with the boy Teledemos (i 16.1). Her 'professional' acquaintance with the flute-girl Arsinoe³¹ is, given their mutual connection with Nausikles, no doubt as much sexual as musical. The clear implication is that the relationships actually mentioned in the text are only the tip of Thisbe's sexual iceberg. Nausikles, who so casually transfers his attentions from Arsinoe to Thisbe on the most superficial of pretexts (ii 8.5: he does not like the way flute-playing distends her cheeks), is a family man with a daughter at home in Chemmis, though nothing is said of a wife. On the other hand, neither Theagenes nor Charikleia has any previous sexual experience: Charikleia deifies the virgin state, to the chagrin of her foster-father (ii 33.5), while Theagenes swears on oath to Kalasiris that he has never had carnal contact with a woman because he has never found a woman worthy of his love (iii 17.4). Once they have fallen in love, however, their love is permanent and lifelong;³² each would rather die than be coerced into union with anyone else.³³ It would violate the whole moral code of the

²⁷ i 8.4, ii 5.2, v 2.10, viii 6.4, x 20.2.

²⁸ Demainete does twice refer to Knemon as her ψυχή, but the first instance (i 9.4) is in a passage of obvious insincerity and is no more than a stratagem to wheedle him into her bed; the second (i 14.6) occurs after she has destroyed him, and is lamenting her loss, ostensibly as a mother but in reality as a lover: the irony is clear.

²⁹ i 2.4, i 4.1, ii 1.2 f., ii 4.4, v 33.1, vi 8.6, vi 9.3, viii 8.4, viii 9.8, viii 13.3, x 19.2.

³⁰ i 15.8: εἰ δὲ τύχοις ὦν βούλει, μάλιστα μὲν εἰκὸς σχολάσαι τὸν ἔρωτα, πολλαῖς γὰρ κατὰ τὴν πρώτην πείραν ἔναπεσβέσθη τὰ τῆς ἐπιθυμίας· κόρος γὰρ ἔρωτος τῶν ἔργων τὸ τέλος.

³¹ i 15.7: τὴν Ἀρσινοῖον, οὖσαν μοι πάλαι γνωρίμην ἀπὸ τῆς τέχνης . . .

³² E.g. v 5.2: οὐδένα γὰρ χρόνον εἶναι ὄσος ἀμαυρῶσαι αὐτοῖς τῶν ψυχῶν τὰ ἐρωτικά γνωρίσματα; v 2.7: βιώσεσθαι . . . τὸ λειπόμενον ἅμα τῷ φιλάτῳ.

³³ i 8.3, i 26.1, ii 4.2, iv 13.4, v 29.4, vii 21.5, vii 25.5, vii 26.3, x 33.2. At iv 11.3, after Charikles has expressed a wish that Charikleia should marry her cousin Alkamenes, she exclaims: Ἀλκαμένει μὲν . . . τάφον πρότερον ἢ γάμον τὸν ἐμὸν εὐτρεπιζέτω, ἐμὲ γὰρ ἢ Θεαγένης ἀξεται ἢ τὸ τῆς εἰμαρμένης διαδέξεται. This has been misunderstood by translators: she is not wishing Alkamenes dead but praying for her own death, as the second clause makes clear; τὸν ἐμὸν agrees with τάφον as well as γάμον (for the word order cf. iv 14.1: σὺν τέχνῃ πολλῇ καὶ σοφίᾳ τῇ ἐμῇ, and iv 18.5: γένος τε καὶ οἶκον τὸν ἡμέτερον).

novel to imagine that one day they might grow tired of one another. Their sufferings can only make sense if a lifetime of happiness together awaits them at the end.

(d) Besides being reciprocal, the love of Theagenes and Charikleia is spontaneous and—once initial feelings of shame are overcome—given freely and joyfully. To continue to love one another despite all the obstacles and all the temptations to the contrary is the supreme choice that gives their lives meaning. Athenian love on the other hand deals in seduction, deception and, in the last resort, coercion. Demainete tries to seduce Knemon with false displays of maternal love (i 9.3), just as she traps the dotting Aristippos with insincere exhibitions of devotion (i 9.2). When Knemon refuses to be seduced, she concocts a scheme, equally deceptive, to punish him.³⁴ Demainete then herself falls victim to a deceptive ruse. Falsehood lies close to the heart of the Athenian ethos as manifested in the novella; it is a close cousin of infidelity, and antithetical to the close, open, pure and true love of Theagenes and Charikleia.

(e) The power to seduce and coerce depends on a disparity of age and status which marks all the Athenian relationships, though this is to an extent counterbalanced by the seductive power of the Athenian female. In her dealings with Knemon, Demainete uniquely combines social authority (in the status of stepmother, which gives her quasi-parental power over Knemon and also makes her an honorary member of his father's generation and so entitled to his deference) with the female power of seduction. She exploits the latter alone against Aristippos, who is her senior,³⁵ as does Thisbe against Knemon, who is her social superior. At Athens seduction and female τέχνη can reverse hierarchies of age and station, but the point is that we are always left with relationships in which the two participants meet as in some sense superior and inferior. Athenian love is, among other things, about power and domination. Theagenes and Charikleia meet as equals: they are of an age³⁶ and have similar social backgrounds in the very top echelons of Greek society.

(f) We have just mentioned the skill at seduction displayed by the Athenian women. This is their τέχνη, a necessary part of their armament as sexual predators. So, Demainete is described as δεινὴ εἴπερ τις γυναικῶν ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν ἐκμῆναι καὶ τέχνην τὴν ἐπαγωγὸν ἐκτόπως ἠκριβωμένη (i 9.2), and Thisbe shares a suggestive τέχνη with Arsinoe (i 15.7). Their skill leads them, unnaturally, to take the sexual initiative. Demainete tries to seduce Knemon, Thisbe comes to him in the night; it is easy to forget how abnormal it must have been for a slave-woman to take the initiative in a sexual liaison with her master—though no doubt the episode embodies a fantasy of a kind widespread among the novel's predominantly male readership. Athenian women are blatant and forward. Charikleia on the other hand is all modesty and innocence. What attracts men to her is her peerless beauty, an entirely natural beauty that owes nothing to human artifice. She already possesses it at the age of seven when Charikles sees her for the first time (ii 30.6), and in the opening scene of the whole work, when she is in a sticky situation, surrounded by twitching corpses and with her lover expiring at her feet, her physical beauty retains its power to stun the Egyptian bandits (i 2.5). This is the opposite of Demainete, who is introduced as a γύναιον ἀστειῖον (i 9.1) and employs the allurements of dress and cosmetics,³⁷ a specific aspect of the polarity between τέχνη and nature.

(g) Charikleia will not allow her love to be consummated outside marriage. She has fended off even Theagenes until the day their union can be legally solemnised³⁸ and makes her

³⁴ Possibly, on the basis of the parallels between Demainete and Arsake, we should read this punishment as an attempt to coerce him into complying with her desires; if so, it is implied rather than stated; cf., however, i 15.5: ὡσπερ οὐκ ἐρωσά τινος ἀλλ' ἄρχουσα δεινὸν ὅτι μὴ ἐξ ἐπιτάγματος ὑπήκουσεν ἐποιησάμην.

³⁵ This, I take it, is the point of the diminutive, γύναιον, with which she is characterised on her first appearance (i 9.1); cf. i 9.2: τῇ τε ὥρα τὸν πρεσβύτην ἐπαγομένη.

³⁶ Charikleia is seventeen (x 14.4); Theagenes' age is not specified, but he is introduced as an ἔφηβος (i 2.2).

³⁷ So, for example, Thisbe says to her (i 17.1): κόσμη σαυτὴν· ἀβρότερον ἔχουσαν ἤκειν προσήκει.

³⁸ i 25.4: εἰς δεῦρο διετέλεσα καθαρὰν ἑμαυτὴν καὶ ἀπὸ σῆς ὀμιλίας φυλάττουσα, πολλάκις μὲν ἐπιχειροῦντα διωσαμένη, τὸν δὲ ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἡμῖν συγκεϊμένον τε καὶ ἐνωμοτον ἐπὶ πᾶσι γάμον ἔνθεσμον εἶ πη γένοιτο περισκοποῦσα.

unfortunate lover swear an oath to have no carnal knowledge of her until she is reunited with her parents.³⁹ The whole novel ends with a ceremony of betrothal and the departure of the entire cast into the city of Meroe to celebrate τὰ ἐπὶ τῷ γάμῳ μυστικώτερα (x 41.3, the very last words of the text apart from a colophon in which the author identifies himself). Athenian marriage is unloving, and love is extra-marital. It recognises social prohibitions on and punishments for adultery only to disregard them (i 11.4).

(h) Charikleia is a paradigm of chastity. Chastity was enjoined on her by her mother in the ταῖνιά left beside her when she was exposed as a baby (iv 8.7), and dominates her thoughts throughout the novel,⁴⁰ until the theme culminates with the radiant and triumphant vindication of her virginity on the Ethiopian gridiron, an icon of luminous purity shared with Theagenes (x 9). But, despite a tempting biographical tradition identifying Heliodoros as a Thessalian bishop who enforced celibacy among his clergy⁴¹ the *Aithiopika* is not an anti-sexual text. Love's consummation is the end to which the experiences of hero and heroine are directed. It is also the end of their novel. It is to achieve union that they endure the whims of destiny. Neither they nor their creator seems inclined to think beyond the consummation of their love: it is an act that nothing can follow, a true τέλος. Charikleia's chastity is what imparts meaning to her ultimate surrender of herself to Theagenes: that she considers her virginity worth preserving at such cost makes it a gift of infinite value to the man to whom she chooses to yield it. Her chastity, then, is not a value in itself (as she had mistakenly believed it to be before she met Theagenes),⁴² but part of the high seriousness with which a love of such profundity must be enacted. She and Theagenes are untypical ideals, as the Ethiopian chastity-test makes clear, and again they stand at the opposite pole to the morality of Athens: Athenian love is not meaningful because it is not chaste. Here love is devalued by its ready availability (in the case of Thisbe at least) into a meaningless physical act which can serve as a means to other ends. So Thisbe seduces Knemon to further Demainete's schemes of revenge; she and Arsinoe both sleep with Nausikles for pecuniary gain, and also, in Thisbe's case, to facilitate escape from justice; Demainete herself uses sex as a means to obtain what she wants from Aristippos—status and wealth. Athenian morality involves an inversion of means and ends, and so desecrates what should be the culmination of human life.

(i) The love of Theagenes and Charikleia is a sacrament. Its whole course is of concern to the gods, who are acknowledged at the end as the authors of its successful conclusion (x 40.1: θεῶν νεύματι τούτων οὕτω διαπεπραγμένων; cf. x 41.1). Their first encounter is resonant with Platonic allusions and takes place under the sanction of a religious festival, the performance of an ἔναγισμός for the Thessalian hero Neoptolemos at the Pythian Games. Their story reaches its culmination, as it began, at a religious ceremony, to which the announcement of their marriage forms the climax. There is an important motivic link here with Knemon's story. It is when he returns from the Great Panathenaia, still in his ephebic uniform, that Demainete's lust becomes uncontrollable. Her advances profane the sacrament of his piety. The juxtaposition is one of significant irony and heightens the sense of shock engendered by her shamelessness. Thus the repeated motif of religious pageant locates Athenian and Charikleian love at opposite ends of a scale running from blasphemy to sacrament.

(j) Finally we may contrast the outcome of Athenian love with that of the ideal. Love leads Demainete to humiliation, judicial arrest and death in a pit, the βόθρος where sacrifices were made to chthonic heroes. It leads Thisbe to the threat of judicial torture and then to death under ground, in an Egyptian cave at the hands of Thyamis. It leads Knemon to judicial conviction for

³⁹ iv 18.5: καὶ ἔτι μᾶλλον τῶν μελλόντων ὄρκῳ πρὸς Θεαγένην τὸ ἀσφαλὲς ἐμπεδωθεῖν ὡς οὐτε ὀμιλήσει τὰ Ἀφροδίτης πρότερον ἢ γένος τε καὶ οἴκου τὸν ἡμέτερον ἀπολαβεῖν ἢ, εἴπερ τοῦτο κωλύει δαίμων, ἀλλ' οὖν γε πάντως βουλομένην γυναικὰ ποιεῖσθαι ἢ μηδαμῶς. Cf. also iv 10.6, vi 9.4; even in her dreams he must respect her chastity (vi 8.6).

⁴⁰ i 3.1, i 8.3, ii 33.4 f., iv 18.4 ff., v 4.5, vi 8.6, viii

13.2, etc.

⁴¹ Sokr. *Hist. ekkl.* v 22 (Colonna [n. 4] Test. i); cf. R. M. Rattenbury, *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, Literary and Historical Section* i (1927) 168 ff., C. Lacombrade, *REG* lxxxiii (1970) 70 ff.

⁴² ii 33.4–5: ἀπηγόρευται . . . αὐτῇ γάμος καὶ παρθεύειν τὸν πάντα βίον διατείνεται . . . ἐκθειάζουσα παρθεῖαν καὶ ἐγγὺς ἀθανάτων ἀποφαίνουσα.

attempted parricide, to a narrow escape from execution by being hurled into the βάραθρον near the Akropolis, then to exile. It leads Aristippos to judicial confiscation of his property, then to exile. But Charikleia's love leads her home from exile to a final pageant of light and joy. Her story ends not with death but with a recognition couched in judicial terms (x 10.1: δίκη . . . καὶ κρίσις), reunion with her parents, presented as like a second birth (ix 25.1, x 3.1, x 16.2, x 16.6, x 16.10, x 18.3), and finally in marriage to the man she loves for the procreation of children, θεσμῶν παιδογονίας (x 40.2). The mirroring is obvious: instead of conviction and condemnation, recognition and reprieve; instead of exile, return; instead of death, new life. The striking parallels between the death of Demainete and Thisbe (and the execution so narrowly escaped by Knemon) form part of the pattern. The darkness of death under ground, of the Underworld almost, coheres with the darkness that shrouds Knemon's novella (which is told at night, and most of whose action takes place at night), but contrasts with the radiance surrounding Charikleia on the Ethiopian gridiron,⁴³ with the torchlight accompanying the final procession into Meroe, with the whiteness of the priestly insignia and of the animals pulling the ceremonial carriages (x 41.3), and, most important, with the light-giving deities Helios and Selene, whose ministers Theagenes and Charikleia have become. Polarities of light and dark, white and black, are a fundamental part of the novel's image-system,⁴⁴ but here they are made to underpin, by the close parallel of theme and motif, a somewhat larger and ethically meant antithesis between Athenian and Charikleian love.

This antithesis is embodied in the persons of Charikleia and Thisbe, who seems deliberately written up as a sort of *Doppelgänger* to the heroine. She is mistaken for Charikleia in the cave first by Thyamis, who kills her, secondly by Theagenes, who mourns over her body. Both Thisbe and Charikleia were secreted in the cave by their brigand admirers, who themselves form a contrasting pair of noble outlaw, who respects his female captives and leads his men like a king, against simple ruffian. Later, Charikleia is made to adopt the name and identity of Thisbe after being captured by Nausikles, and is once again mistaken for Thisbe, by Knemon as she laments (v 3.1). This last example is partly just a spooky effect, of course, but the persistence of the pairing is suggestive of something more than a simple thrill, and confirms that we should read Thisbe as an anti-Charikleia. One of Heliodoros' imaginative strengths is his ability to construct icons, profoundly memorable, of the issues and significations of his text. One such icon encapsulates the meaning of Thisbe and Charikleia. Charikleia is hidden in a labyrinthine cave on an island surrounded by labyrinthine reed-beds (i 29.1, cf. i 6.2). Knemon stations her at the very heart of the double labyrinth, where a certain, dim light penetrates (i 29.2), but Thisbe is hidden away from the centre, in total darkness. Is it too fanciful to see here a cypher for the novel itself, whose multiple narrations are like concentric mazes? At the centre of the maze/text stand heroine and her antitype, differentiated by light and darkness, one to live, one to die. If we can grasp what the juxtaposition of these two figures means, we are very close to understanding the values that the *Aithiopika* expresses.

So we have a whole series of interlocked and overlapping polarities between the action of the novella and that of the novel. To demarcate and enumerate them as I have done is, of course, an artificial exercise, alien to the experience of actually reading the text, but its justification is that it articulates into manageable segments a large antithesis that is meant to be felt as a whole, and illustrates just how comprehensive and basic that antithesis is. Ideal love is defined, motif by motif, by the illustration of its polar opposite, and the grid of values provided by the juxtaposition of novel and novella enables us to locate morally the other amatory situations that confront the hero and heroine: the sensual carnality of the Persian court, the unreciprocated

⁴³ x 9.3 ff., a passage verbally and thematically connected to the scene at Arsake's stake (viii 9.13 f.), when after a judicial process expected death makes way for a salvation saturated with light.

⁴⁴ The prominence of the sun in the novel is part of

this image-system, not (as argued by F. Altheim, *Literatur und Gesellschaft im ausgehenden Altertum* i [Halle 1948] 93–124) a declaration of faith by a devotee of the Emesan sun-cult.

desires of certain males for Charikleia, the convenient and conventional but unloving marriages to her cousins Alkamenes and Meroebos into which her adoptive and natural fathers try to dragoon her, the activities of merchants who cannot see beyond financial values. Read in this way the greater part of the novel can be seen as following on from Knemon's novella in exploring the antithesis between true love and various corrupt or otherwise unsatisfactory alternatives.

This is a romantic view which places love uncontested at the centre of human experience. We can perhaps understand the conception more fully if we compare it with the erotic system of, for example, Roman elegy. In elegy the basic polarity is one of loving or not loving. The life of love stands in opposition to the social norm of civic and military duty, and the literary norm of public, specifically epic, poetry. Love represents a rejection of social convention. In romance, on the other hand, the possibility of not loving is hardly countenanced. Even the potentially ascetic priestly characters of the *Aithiopika* act willingly to promote the love of Theagenes and Charikleia and rejoice at its happy ending. The underlying polarity that informs the episodes of the plot is one of loving well or loving badly.

Of all the episodes of the main plot, the one that most concretely embodies loving badly, and also that which is most precisely prefigured by Knemon's novella, is that of the Persian princess Arsake. She poses the same kind of seductive threat to Theagenes as Demainete posed to Knemon. Like Demainete, she is a predatory female, sexually promiscuous,⁴⁵ a slave to illicit and perverted pleasure.⁴⁶ She pursues Theagenes but is concerned only with her own gratification; when she fails to obtain it immediately, her passion, like Demainete's, becomes destructive and degenerates into madness (vii 9.3 cf. i 14.6). If her advances are rebuffed, she resorts to punishment and coercion, or vengeance, as in her previous attempt on Thyamis (vii 2.1 ff.). If Demainete regretted acting like a tyrant instead of a lover (i 15.5), Arsake has no such qualms and rejoices when the course of events allows her to proclaim Theagenes literally her slave (vii 24.4)—though he demonstrates his superiority to the average human male by continuing to defy her, a telling inversion of the familiar trope which makes the lover his mistress's willing slave. She even has a female servant who corresponds roughly to Thisbe: her old nurse Kybele, whose function it is to act as procuress for her mistress, and whose Lesbian origins are surely intended to define her morally (vii 12.6). Like Demainete, Arsake ends by taking her own life, after her adulterous conduct has been revealed—or, rather, is on the point of being revealed—to her husband. Demainete and Arsake have much in common, then, both in their characterisation and in the overall shape of their stories. But Heliodoros has employed a clever device to ensure that we link them. It is no original observation to point out the similarity of the story of Demainete and Knemon to that of Phaidra and Hippolytos, a similarity to which Demainete herself draws attention when she calls Knemon ὁ νέος Ἴππόλυτος.⁴⁷ It is interesting and suggestive that the one important facet of Euripides' Phaidra omitted from the tale of Demainete, the relationship of the heroine to her nurse and the rôle of the latter as go-between, seems to be resumed in the episode of Arsake. Most crucially, however, Arsake is also linked to Phaidra by means of unmistakable verbal allusion to Euripides' play.⁴⁸ So Demainete and Arsake are connected through the mythical figure of Phaidra and are intended to stand jointly as the antitype of the sexual morality of the central pair.

This patterning is not gratuitous. We have already touched on the idea that narrative satisfaction depends on the story reaching the right end at the proper time; excitement and suspense arise when intrusions threaten to short-circuit that process and bring the story too soon

⁴⁵ Cf. Achaimenes' reaction to the arrival of Theagenes in the palace (vii 16.1): σύνθηθές τι καὶ ἀφροδίσιον διακόνημα τῆ Ἀρσάκη τὸν Θεαγένην ὑποτοπήσας.

⁴⁶ vii 2.1, vii 9.2.

⁴⁷ i 10.2. A reference to Theseus follows in the MSS, but is impenetrable as the text stands; it should perhaps be excised, as argued by P. Neimke, *Quaestiones*

Heliodoreae (Halle 1889) 15 n. 1, anticipating Rattenbury's note in the apparatus of his Budé text. For discussion of the novella as variant of the Phaidra story, see M. Donnini, *MCSN* iii (1981) 145–60.

⁴⁸ viii 15.2: τέθηκεν Ἀρσάκη βρόχον ἀγχόνης ἀψαμένη, echoing E. *Hipp.* 802: βρόχον κρεμαστὸν ἀγχόνης ἀνήψατο.

to the wrong end. Now clearly the right ending to the story of Theagenes and Charikleia is the consummation of their chaste love in Ethiopia, and so the complications of the narrative tend to involve threats to their lives or their virtue. If either of them were to die, or were to prove inadequate, to yield to temptation or circumstance and compromise on the essential nature of their love, the plot would short-circuit and fail to reach the conclusion which we desire it to reach, and which, as practised readers of the genre, we know it *must* reach. The episode in Arsake's palace deals with the subtler of the two potential short-circuits: temptation. The hedonistic, dominating princess is a male fantasy-figure: we are encouraged to imagine the sensual delights that await Theagenes should he accede to her desires. And yet the consequences of compromised virtue have already been rehearsed through the novella of Knemon, which has implanted in our minds the autodestructive nature of profane love of the kind offered by Arsake. The issues at stake in the palace and the threat to the course of the story are activated in a way that would have been impossible without the programmatic novella. In this Heliodoros anticipates the use of the double plot in much modern drama and fiction, where a subplot is exploited to demonstrate a different solution to the problems worked through by the main plot. The *Aithiopika* then is a real artistic unity.

We are now in a position to state some summary conclusions. Knemon's novella is, by reason of its programmatic position and its contents, a vital part of the moral economy of the whole novel. At one level it can be read as guaranteeing the 'truth' of the central experience offered by the *Aithiopika* by pre-empting any suggestion that Charikleia's virtue is no more than the product of her author's naive idealism. The subplot demonstrates that he knows and understands the negative as well as the positive potential of human nature.⁴⁹ At a second level, the novella rehearses and primes the threat of short-circuit posed not just by Arsake, but by other amatory encounters also. At the third and deepest level it forms part of a statement of values, of an examination and taxonomy of different kinds of love: giving and taking, spiritual and physical, sacred and profane, serious and trivial, selfless and selfish, meaningful and meaningless. The values themselves may strike us as bourgeois, conventional, sentimental, merely comfortable. They are certainly the kind of thing that a readership in an increasingly fragmented and depoliticised world would like to hear. But they are real values nonetheless, not so very different from the ethics that made Christianity such an attractive belief in that same uncertain world, and still potent even today. The function of Knemon's novella as I see it is to focus the work on the sexual and social values that romance in general takes for granted. It allows the *Aithiopika* a dimension beyond being simply an exciting fiction well told (though it remains the supreme ancient example of that, too), a philosophical dimension that gives a serious answer to the question of how and why one should love. The conclusion is paradoxically obvious: Heliodoros wrote a novel about love, but, thanks to the inclusion of Knemon's story, it is a novel *about* love in a new and deeper sense.

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⁴⁹ This use of the double plot is outlined by W. Empson, *Some versions of pastoral* (London 1950) 53.